

REMARKS/ARGUMENTS

Claims 13-24 remain pending without amendment. New claims 25-32 have been added by this Amendment. Please charge \$86.00 to deposit account 02-1653 for one independent claim in excess of three. No new matter has been added and reconsideration of claims 13-32 is requested in view of the following comments.

In the Office Action mailed March 1, 2004, claims 13-24 were rejected as lacking novelty over Plugge et al. (US 6,356,185) or as being obvious over Plugge et al. either alone or in combination with Kwang (US 5,384,855).

The present US application is the US national stage filing of, and is entitled to the International Filing Date of, PCT/EP99/04953. Because the International Filing Date (July 13, 1999) of this PCT application is earlier than the earliest US filing date (October 27, 1999) of Plugge et al., this reference does not satisfy the requirements of 35 U.S.C. 102(e). Thus, Plugge et al. is not available as a prior art reference against the present claims. Consequently, it is respectfully submitted that all rejections based upon Plugge et al. should be withdrawn and no further substantive comments concerning the teachings of Plugge et al. are required or warranted.

With respect to the references cited in paragraph 6 of the outstanding Office Action, it is respectfully believed that claims 13-32 patentably distinguish from these references in ways that are readily apparent to a person skilled in the art, which belief is based upon the failure to utilize any of these background references to reject claims 13-24. Further, in view of recent case law concerning prosecution history estoppel, comments to distinguish irrelevant references are inadvisable and for this additional reason, will not be offered.

However, it is noted that Prus (US 6,275,590) has a US filing date after the German priority date (July 14, 1998) of the present application and thus, the Applicants reserve the right to antedate the Prus reference by filing an English translation of the German priority document.

Applicants have attempted to be fully compliant in this response to the outstanding Office Action and believe that the application is now in condition for allowance. However, should the Examiner have any further suggestions or recommendations, the undersigned would welcome a telephone call from her in order to expedite placement of the application into condition for allowance.

Respectfully submitted,



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